

## **How does podcasting fit into a company's training programs?**

*By Dave Boggs, CEO of SyberWorks, Inc.*

Now that the buzz surrounding podcasting has subsided some, what is the place of podcasting in today's learning arsenal? It's a very good question. By now, most learning professionals have heard of podcasts in one way or another. They may have learned about them from buying their children's iPods. Or they themselves may have been among the small minority of early experimenters who have used them in their courses and training. Or perhaps somewhere in between.

Apple really did a great job coining the terms "podcast" and "podcasting." In some ways, these terms have become as widely used as when we say "Kleenex" instead of "tissue," or "Xerox/Xeroxing" instead of "making reproductions on a copy machine." A podcast is really just a type of digital media file which plays audio in a browser or on a portable device.

But podcasting has gone high-profile! Which do you think sounds better when you're at an e-Learning conference surrounded by other learning and training professionals?:

"Why John, we have been using podcasts for a while now in our online training programs, how about you?"

"Why John, we have been using audio for a while now in our online training programs, how about you?"

As many people know, the two most popular podcast formats are mp3 files and m4a files. If you are an Apple enthusiast, you will say Apple's m4a file is really the only true podcast audio file, but when most people talk about podcasts or podcasting they are referring to mp3 files as well. And it just so happens that the mp3 file format is more widely used and supported.

In the last few months, a couple of academic papers and studies have questioned the learning effectiveness of podcasts. While most students, learners, companies, training managers, and instructors seem enthusiastic about using and applying this technology, other factors can inhibit their effectiveness and use. For example, the podcast medium (by nature) is one-sided, because most learners are listening to only part of a lecture—an explanation or briefing—which is not an interactive activity in and of itself.

Creating a podcast also requires decent equipment, extra software, and knowledge of how to record and edit audio files. So podcast creation is a skill many e-Learning developers may not have. It also helps to have your own voice talent or (if you are doing video podcasting) access to professional models. Let's face it, your company's subject-matter expert may be the most knowledgeable person in the entire industry on XYZ circuits, but they may not present very well in audio or video.

Additional factors, relating to the type of information in the podcasts, can complicate their execution and deployment. For example, the:

Type of audience (such as field personnel who use mobile devices exclusively).

Level of security needed (such as secure RSS).

Delivery methods required (such as product briefings via Blackberry).

Most training project managers understand that such factors translate into additional money that will be needed to develop their training.

At this point, you're probably thinking, "Dave, you're pretty down on podcasts!" And that is not true! I am proud to say that SyberWorks has three different podcast series:

The [SyberWorks e-Learning Podcast Series](#).

The [SyberWorks LMS e-Learning Implementation Podcast Series](#).

The [e-Learning Lingo Podcast Series](#).

In our e-Learning development division, we produce all types of audio and video for our clients as well.

But now, you are saying, "Okay Dave, but can podcasts work with a learning management system (LMS)? A good LMS can track and manage all types of web content: audio, video, podcasts, synchronous or asynchronous e-Learning, instructor-lead training, web conferencing, study helps, or traditional offline training. The SyberWorks LMS tracks and manages all of these types of web content, and more.

So where might podcasting fit, in your own e-Learning environment? I see podcasting as one of many items in the tool box that supports your online training and overall training objectives. It can be used as a study-help aid, or as a performance-support tool that can be integrated into online courses and larger training programs. Finally, podcasts should be developed and integrated with the same level of diligence and care that is used to create any other study-help materials, performance-support information, or learner evaluations. Okay, so that should settle it, I really do think podcasts and podcasting have a place in e-Learning, and in your company's training programs.

#### *About the Author:*

Dave Boggs is the founder and CEO of SyberWorks, Inc. (<http://www.syberworks.com>). He has been involved with computer-based and web-based training for more than twelve years. Before founding SyberWorks, Dave was the VP of Sales and Business Development for Relational Courseware. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics from Union College in Schenectady, NY, and an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL.

Dave also writes two blogs in the e-Learning space. The first blog, **The Boggs e-Learning Chronicle** (<http://www.boggse-learningchronicle.typepad.com/>) covers news, trends, and observations about the e-Learning and web-based-training industries. His second blog, **The Online Training Content Journal** ([http://www.boggse-learningchronicle.typepad.com/the\\_online\\_training\\_conte/](http://www.boggse-learningchronicle.typepad.com/the_online_training_conte/)) discusses best practices, techniques, and trends in online training development and e-Learning instructional design.